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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: NEGOTIATION ROUND ABORTED AS SOUTH OSSETIANS

REFUSE ENTRY TO GEORGIAN DELEGATION MEMBER

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Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for reasons 1.4(b) & (d).

Summary

1. (C) The latest scheduled round of the Joint Control Commission (JCC) failed to convene after the South Ossetians refused to permit one member of the Georgian delegation, peacekeeping battalion commander Paata Bedniashvili, to enter Tskhinvali for the talks. OSCE Ambassador Roy Reeve told us

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both sides deserve blame for the failure. The Georgians had notified the South Ossetians in advance that Bedniashvili -- whom the South Ossetians accuse of war crimes -- would be a member of the delegation, but the South Ossetians did not react until stopping him at the de facto border on the morning of the talks. Reeve suspects the Georgians may have in fact sought the impasse to demonstrate the futility of the JCC format. The sides have agreed to another round soon in Vladikavkaz, and Reeve believes preserving a channel for dialogue is critical, given the worsening atmosphere between the two sides. Reeve cited three troubling new developments: credible reports of the arrival of a number of so-called "Cossacks" in South Ossetia, a soon-to-be-released report by Joint Peacekeeping Forces (JPKF) commander Kulakhmetov noting a big increase in incidents, largely attributable to the South Ossetians, and recent Georgian military exercises reportedly involving the positioning of artillery aimed in the direction of Tskhinvali. (Note: Embassy DAO is attempting to confirm this last report. End Note.) End Summary.

Stopped En Route

2. (SBU) As Reeve explained to us September 16, the latest round of talks began with an informal meeting September 14 to discuss the agenda for the formal meeting. At first, it appeared that even this pre-meeting would be a failure, with the Georgians and the other co-chairs -- Russia, South Ossetia, and North Ossetia -- engaging in circular arguments about the format. Then the Georgians unexpectedly switched gears and agreed to an agenda. With the other sides at the table for the start of the meeting September 15, Georgian State Minister for Conflict Resolution Merab Antadze called to say that Bedniashvili was being refused entry at the "immigration post" that marks the entry into South Ossetian-controlled territory. The South Ossetians claimed that they could not guarantee the security of Bedniashvili, whom they accuse of crimes for his alleged role in the 2004 hostilities and a September 2005 mortar firing incident. The Georgians then traveled back to Gori and consulted with the others by phone. Eventually all sides decided the meeting

would have to be abandoned.

13. (SBU) Reeve said Bedniashvili had taken part in the last JCC round in Moscow, which gave the lie to South Ossetian JCC co-chair Chochiev's statement during this latest controversy that he would not sit at the same table with him. Reeve said the Georgians had included Bedniashvili's name in the delegation list given to the South Ossetians a week before the meeting, and Antadze had told Reeve that he mentioned it to them again in passing September 14. Reeve said that although the South Ossetians' sensitivities about Bedniashvili were well-known, Antadze thought the Ossetians had never clearly said he would be refused entry, despite being warned he would attend. Reeve said the Russian and North Ossetian co-chairs told Chochiev at the aborted meeting that refusing entry was a "stupid" step. That said, however, Reeve told us he suspected the Georgians had foreseen this turn of events -- and that was likely why they agreed to an agenda. He thought they wanted to use the failure of the talks to highlight the ineffectiveness of the JCC format.

14. (SBU) The remaining co-chairs and Reeve agreed to hold another round September 27-28 in Vladikavkaz. Antadze also agreed to a meeting in Vladikavkaz "soon," although the date was not definitively agreed before Antadze departed for the UNGA in New York. (Note: The Georgians subsequently told us that due to scheduling conflicts they were likely to propose October 12-13 for the meeting. End Note.) Russian co-chair Popov indicated that the border crossing at Kemo Lars could be temporarily opened for the delegations. (Note: This suggests there is no real reason for keeping the crossing closed. End Note.) Popov there should be "no problem" with the membership of the delegations, clearly suggesting that Bedniashvili could attend, as he had in Moscow.

Worrying Signs

15. (C) Reeve stressed the importance of keeping a channel of communication open, arguing that in the current climate a perception that the JCC process had permanently broken down could have dangerous consequences. He said Joint Peacekeeping Forces (JPKF) commander Kulakhmetov had prepared

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a report -- which was supposed to have been delivered at the aborted JCC meeting -- identifying 367 violations of existing agreements in the conflict in July and August, a large increase over earlier months. The bulk of the violations, Reeve added, were by the South Ossetians. Even more ominously, Reeve said, OSCE's reliable contacts in Tskhinvali were reporting that there were a number of so-called "Cossacks" on the ground in South Ossetia. Reeve said there was a strong sense that South Ossetian defense and militia structures "can't wait" for the expected onslaught from Georgia, and were talking about how easy they believe it would be for small groups to blow up Georgian gas, oil, and electricity lines that run near South Ossetia. As for the Georgians, Reeve said OSCE had seen tracks and heard reports indicating that on two occasions in the previous week, the Georgian military had conducted nighttime exercises involving the movement of artillery to face Tskhinvali. He said it was possible these were regular training exercises, but it was worrying at the very least because word of such maneuvers could not be kept from Tskhinvali for long. (Note: Embassy DAO is currently working on sending an observer to the reported area -- which is outside the zone of conflict but close to Tskhinvali -- to try to confirm these reports of Georgian exercises. End Note.) Add in the deadly September 8 shootout between Georgian and South Ossetian forces, Reeve said, and there is ample reason to be worried where the conflict is headed.

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